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FIRE INTELLIGENCE MODULE IN HIGH DEMAND THIS SUMMER

MISSOULA –

The National Center for Landscape Fire Analysis at The University of Montana has its hands full this summer because of the demand for its increasingly popular service, the Fire Intelligence Module (FIM).

FIM is a trained team that reports to a fire to set up wireless broadband networks that can connect far-flung resources and relay video feeds from cameras placed in remote corners of the wilderness.

"The teams that are managing the fires began to see the gains in efficiency they could have," said Carl Seielstad, a coordinator for FIM.

This summer the group received inquiries from fire managers from California to Minnesota requesting services in their regions, most of which they were unable to provide because of limited manpower and equipment.

For the first part of the summer, the module was in Alaska, installing a "quasi-permanent" broadband system that spans 200 miles at Denali National Park, Seielstad said.

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The system will allow park headquarters on the far eastern edge of the park to communicate and transmit data instantly with a ranger station on the park's isolated western edge.

After the Alaska project was completed, Seielstad said people and resources were moved to Challis, Idaho, to serve fires around the middle fork of the Salmon River.

The wireless network allows fire command teams to avoid spending half their day driving to check on resources, and a series of surveillance cameras and weather stations provide constant information updates.

"For the first time we're part of a team right out of the gate," Seielstad said of this summer's rush. "They (fire managers) are planning their activities based on access to our technology and our people."

Seielstad said he believes that possibilities for improved communications across forests will cause these networks to be made more permanent in the future, instead of the temporary service FIM provides.

"The Forest Service subscribes to a real-time lightning tracker," he said. "A fire lookout sees the lightning; wouldn't it be nice for the lookout to see that map?"

For more information on the Fire Intelligence Module, visit http://firecenter.cfc.umt.edu/firecenter/ and click on "Fire Module."

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